Maharlika

PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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Tight Security

Authorities have ramped up security for this week's summit of Southeast Asian leaders, saying Sunday a terror attack could not be ruled out although there was no specific threat.

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Second Surgery

Singer-composer Ely Buendia, who underwent an emergency angioplasty on Sunday at the Asian Hospital in Alabang, needs a second surgery.

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Asean seeks regional charter

AP

Philippine Navy Special Operations Group divers prepare to check the area around the bridge at Mandaue in Cebu island in central Philippines, as security measures continue for the 12th Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit and its dialogue partners.

Leaders call for increased anti-terror efforts

By ERIC TALMADGE
AP WRITER

CEBU, Philippines (AP)—Southeast Asian summit leaders have agreed to write a charter to create a regional bloc similar to the European Union and establish a free trade zone by 2015, according to a draft of their final statement obtained by The Associated Press on Friday.

ASEAN Page 2

Ex-MILF officer hunted

Brains of Mindanao bombings identified

By GIL C. CABACUNGAN JR.
INQUIRER

President Macapagal-Arroyo ordered Thursday a manhunt for a former operations chief of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front who was allegedly behind the bombings in Mindanao that the Armed Forces chief of staff acknowledged "embarrassed" the administration on the eve of the Asean summit.

In an interview with reporters in Malacañang, AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon said the military had identified the mastermind behind the attacks as "Usman Basit" based on the distinctive style of the "wiring" of the bombs used in the attacks on Wednesday night in the cities of Cotabato, General Santos and Kidapawan. The blasts left seven people dead and 40 others wounded.

EX-MILF Page 2

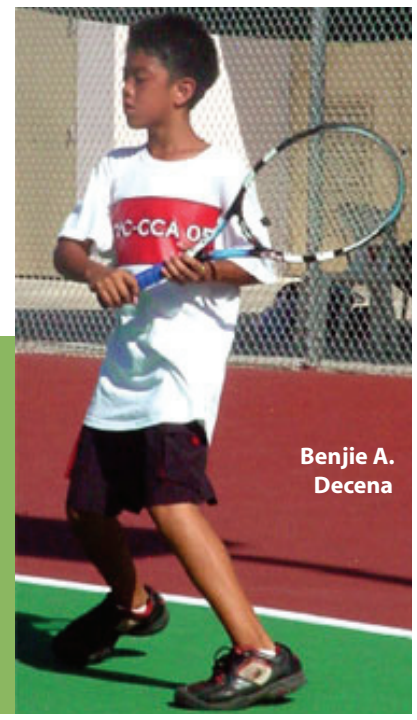
BENJIE A. DECENA III

Boy wonder of local sports

Benedicto A. Decena III is getting recognition left and right, and for good reason.

Born to a Filipino father and a

BOY Page 2



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PINOYNEWS

Using the Internet to look for jobs

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

The Philippine government is ratcheting up its fight against illegal recruitment of overseas Filipino workers, with the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency reminding the Filipino community to take extra care in applying for off island jobs.

The POEA is providing the following tips and advice on searching for jobs through the Internet:

■ Read the entirety of the website. Examine whether the company name and profile appear believable. Check for its company profile or the "about us" page to see its office location and phone numbers.

■ Examine the website design plus all links and pages available. A legitimate company would not mind spending a large money to have a website designed beautifully as the same serves as the business's window to the world.

■ Take note of the website's invitations to send resumes and application papers through postal mail or drop boxes. Most legitimate websites would like you to fill up your resume online or send them through e-mail.

■ Take note of their offers. Most of them offer "too-good-to-be-true" salaries and other job perks including free accommodation and bonuses.

■ Use search engines (Yahoo!, Google, etc.) and look for the company's name or topics similar to those discussed in the website you have visited.

■ Check the domain name of the website to secure additional information.

■ Report to the POEA or other law enforcement authorities any illegal recruitment activities conducted through the Internet.

ASEAN

FROM PAGE 1

The statement, to be issued after the summit concludes Sunday, also includes an agreement on counterterrorism and the protection of migrant workers—both major issues in the region. It vows to create an "ASEAN Economic Community" with a free flow of goods, services, investment and capital by 2015.

Implementing the goals remains a difficulty.

The 10 countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have long voiced support for a joint charter, but the process of writing one remains in its initial stages. Officials here say they see the declaration as a starting point for the charter, but have refused to speculate on when it might actually be completed.

One sticking point has been the proposal to allow member states to sanction others. This is seen as a means to influence the military junta ruling Myanmar, which has long lagged behind the rest of the region in its dismal human rights record.

Before the ASEAN summit this weekend, ASEAN foreign ministers expressed concern over Myanmar's slow progress toward democracy and urged the junta to release all political prisoners.

Terrorism is another major problem.

According the draft, the leaders agreed to share information and training to counter terrorism and cross-border crimes.

The Philippines was on high alert as leaders from across Southeast Asia arrived Friday for the summit, which was preceded by a series of deadly bombings.

More than 8,000 police and soldiers have been mobilized to secure the summit of Southeast Asian leaders, which begins Saturday and is to be followed by a broader summit with ASEAN's Asian dialogue partners on Monday.

The need for enhanced counterterrorism efforts was underscored by the three blasts, which ripped through the southern Philippines on Wednesday, killing at least seven and injuring dozens.

Officials condemned the violence, but said it was not directly related to the summit.

"We would like to dispel any notion that the bombings are related to the ASEAN meeting," said Marciano Paynor, head of the organizing committee. "They were isolated incidents. Our venues are safe."

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EX-MILF

FROM PAGE 1

"He used to be with the MILF and we like to think he is now working with terrorist groups, like the JI (Jemaah Islamiyah) and the Abu Sayyaf," said Esperon.

He said the attacks were a "diversionary tactic" after the Abu Sayyaf suffered reverses in the military campaign in Tawi-Tawi province that last week killed seven militants.

Esperon said he briefed Ms Arroyo yesterday morning on the results of the military's investigation of Wednesday's bombings and she immediately ordered an intensified operation against Usman Basit and the beefing up of security in Cebu. He said Ms Arroyo ordered.

He said Ms Arroyo ordered the military to "go after the Abu Sayyaf without sleep and without any break."

But Esperon admitted that the bombing attacks, although anticipated in the security planning for the Asean summit, left the military red in the face.

"We are embarrassed by this. But more than anything, this should make our resolve even firmer to go against these terrorists," said Esperon.

Artist's sketch of suspect

In General Santos, Chief Supt. German Doria said an artist's sketch of a suspect, who left a backpack near the lotto outlet there, had been reproduced based on an account by an injured female witness.

In the deadliest bomb attack, at least six people were killed and 32 others wounded in the blast near the lotto outlet in General Santos. The second explosion wounded two people in Kidapawan City, and the third, made from an 81-mm mortar, killed a garbage collector and wounded six others in Cotabato City.

Ghadzali Jaafar, MILF political affairs chief, said the three bomb attacks were carried out by the Abu Sayyaf.

"These (bomb) attacks have something to do with the incidents in Sulu where some Abu Sayyaf leaders were recently killed by government troops. The group wants to avenge their deaths," Jaafar said from his hideout in Maguindanao.

MILF denial

The MILF has denied claims by some police officials the MILF was responsible for the attacks. Eid Kabalu, MILF spokesperson, said the rebel group would work with authorities to uncover the identities of those behind the attacks.

Classes in public elementary schools were suspended in Cotabato yesterday to give lawmen and village officials time to clear the city of concealed explosives.

In Kidapawan City, police released the identities of the six injured in Wednesday's blast: Tarcela Reyes, 27, single, a barbecue stand attendant; Kimwel Agad Sures, 25, single, a beautician; Mauricio Handugan Gatan, 52, married, jobless; Jesus Grayda, 30, married, also a barbecue stand attendant; Wilfredo Balili, 49, married, a tricycle driver, and Mark Cedeño Rivas, 14, a student, who remained in critical condition at a hospital.

BOY

FROM PAGE 1

local mother, Benjie has fast established himself as the boy wonder of local sports. He has competed locally and internationally in not one, but three sports categories: tennis, baseball, and soccer.

His achievements have earned this boy from Tinian awards and recognition from fellow athletes. Even the Legislature has taken notice and is expected to soon present him a resolution honoring his athleticism.

"I'm happy that he gets to experience all of this at a young age. I'm proud of everything that he has accomplished. It will build his confidence to do whatever he decides to do in the future," said his father, Benedicto G. Decena Jr.

The older Decena related that he and his son learned to play tennis—apparently Benjie's favored sport—at almost the same time. In one of the family's visits to Saipan about six years ago, Mr. Decena decided to try his hand at tennis. He brought his then eight-year-old son along.

"I found that he had potential to be a good player. It all came as an instinct to him," the father said.

It was only a matter of time before Benjie started entering and winning competitions. He claimed his first victory in the 2004 UMDA-CNMI Junior Tennis Championship, finishing at the top of the boys' singles 10 and under division. In the same year, Benjie bagged the top prize in the same category at the DFS 23rd Micronesian Tennis Championship and the Tennis Coconut Classic, where he and his partner also emerged as champions in the mixed doubles division.

With these accomplishments, he was chosen by the Northern Mariana Amateur Sports Association as Male Student Athlete for February and May 2004, and then as 2004 Male Student Athlete of the Year.

Benjie's winning streak continued. He was proclaimed champion in the boys' singles 13-and-under division of the 2005 Calvo's Tennis Classic.

But 2006 was a particularly busy year for him, as he got his first taste of competing in foreign territory. Last year, Benjie traveled to Guam to participate in the qualifying competition for the International Tennis Federation's Pacific Oceania Plate Junior Championship, and then to Lautoka, Fiji for the actual championship.

Also in 2006, Benjie was declared champion in the DFS 25th Micronesian Tennis Championships' 3.0 men's singles division. He was also a runner-up in the mixed doubles and boys singles 13-and-under divisions.

Benjie is also an active baseball player, reaping awards in the 2006 Tinian Little League Baseball Tournament. Besides being a member of the winning Starz Team, he was also awarded for having the most runs and most stolen bases. He was declared most valuable player of the Tinian League Championship Game and selected to be part of the Tinian All Star Team for the CNMI Little League District Championship.

Soccer is another sport close to Benjie's heart. He competed in this sport when he was younger. He was a member of the Tinian soccer team when it won the DFS Youth Soccer Tournament in 2003 and 2004.

Born on Sept. 25, 1993, Benjie is the son of Benedicto and Florinda Decena. He is currently an eighth grade student at the Tinian Junior/Senior High School. ***(Agnes E. Donato)***

OFW deployments surpass a million

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

The deployment of overseas Filipino workers to190 host countries and economies around the world reached over 1 million in 2006—the first time that the milestone was reached.

This was disclosed by Labor Secretary Arturo D. Brion during the 6th Department of Labor and Employment Research Conference in December 2006.

He said the Philippine government is working to turn this global deployment of documented OFWs into a source of "brain gain" for the country.

Brion urged businesses and other concerned sectors to partner with the government in ensuring the global OFW deployment translate into '"brain gain" for the country.

He said that he and Philippine Business for Social Progress Chair Manuel V. Pangilinan recently discussed the possibility of assisting OFWs in becoming "assets of development" on their return.

"During this discussion, I broached to Mr. Pangilinan, the chairman of the Board of the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Corporation, the importance of businessmen who can take care of our OFWs, particularly those skilled in science, economics, business, and other disciplines, on their return to the Philippines," he said.

Brion added that these developments are in light of the emphasis on "Brain Gain" by the Geneva, Switzerland-based International Organization for Migration.

"The IOM, which considers the Philippines' global migration management system as a model for the world, believes that migrants who have developed and improved their skills abroad can be catalysts of brain gain by transferring and infusing knowledge, skills, and technology into their countries of origin," Brion said.

He said that the IOM's recent 92nd session and high level discussion in Geneva focused on global migration management based on the Philippines' role as the leading source of productive workers for today's global economy.

Brion also said that Taiwan, a major host country of OFWs, has been helping to make 'brain gain' become a reality by initiating a databank of OFW returnees who have worked for six years in Taiwan, for potential work with Taiwanese job-friendly investors in the Clark and Subic special economic zones in the Philippines.

Five win PNB holiday raffle

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

Five Filipino workers in the CNMI won this year's Philippine National Bank Foreign Exchange's PNB Christmas Raffle Draw.

The grand prize went to Roberto Awing, who won a brand new Sony Handycam.

Marialyn Dizon won the second prize, taking home a brand new MagicSing Videoke microphone.

Sonia Relatos took home a brand new color TV, while Edwin Orejola won a microwave oven. The fifth prize, a brand new vacuum cleaner, went to Hedelita Sayson.

The raffle draw was held last Saturday at the PNB Foreign Exchange Saipan office in Susupe.

PNB marketing officer Con Pobre said the grand raffle draw also drew a handful of overseas Filipino workers who witnessed the drawing.

Pobre said the winners were selected from the hundreds of OFWs who regularly remit money to their loved ones in the Philippines. Remitters automatically received a ticket stub every time they sent money to the Philippines through PNB.

Pobre said all prizes have already been claimed this week. He thanked all Filipinos for their support through the years.

He said the company has been holding the annual Christmas raffle since 1998 as their way to thank customers.

PNB is the largest remittance network in the world with 97 overseas branches. PNB bagged another plum during the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Stakeholders' Awards 2006 by winning the Outstanding Commercial Bank Reporter on OFW Remittances. The bank was cited for its accuracy and timeliness of reportage that affirms the integrity of PNB data, and the bank being the global Filipinos' choice for traditional remittances.

Also in 2006, in a survey conducted by Reader's Digest with Nielsen Media Research, consumers voted PNB as one of the most trusted banks in the Philippines. The Gold Award in 2006 marked the third year in a row that Philippine National Bank topped the Reader's Digest survey.

PNB Foreign Exchange in the CNMI continues to provide Rapid Remit service, and still offers premium services on its Payment at PNB Counters, Door-to-Door Remittance Delivery and Credit to Other Banks.

LABOR FRONT

Farm workers who engage in sales

By FERDIE P. DE LA TORRE
REPORTER

Q: Is it lawful for nonresident farm workers to conduct retail vending of vegetables?

A: No. In a recent labor case, the Labor director cited two farm workers found engaging in retail sales of vegetables with three violations of the Nonresident Workers Act.

The first violation cited was a section of the Act that provides that "no employer or nonresident worker shall execute any contract, make any other agreement, or change any existing contract…without the approval of the Labor chief."

The second violation cited was another section of the Act that provides that "a nonresident worker shall not be permitted to perform any services or labor…for any employer other than the employer for whom the chief has approved an employment contract with such worker."

And the last violation was another section of the Act that provides that "an employer may assign an employee to perform any services or labor outside the employee's job classification; provided that such assignment…is in the same occupational category…"

■ ■ ■

Q: What are the penalties facing an employer or the farm workers who change any existing employment contract without Labor's approval?

A: A violation of the first cited section of the Act may render the contract voidable; be grounds for revocation; or grounds to disqualify an employer from further use of any nonresident labor.

■ ■ ■

Q: Nonresident farm workers work outside their job categories on the mistaken belief that they are permitted to do so after their employer submitted an amendment to their employment contract asking for a change of job classification to that of sales person. What will happen if Labor discovered that the amendment for their job classification has not been approved?

A: In the same case in which the Labor director cited three violations, Labor administrative hearing officer Barry Hirshbein barred the employer from hiring any new nonresident workers for a one-year period. Hirshbein also ordered the employer to pay a $300 fine. He ruled that the amendment of the employment contract cannot proceed until after the fines are paid.

With respect to the two farm workers, Hirsbein ordered them to each pay a $100 fine. He also ruled the farm workers may not work as salesmen until after their permits are amended.

Submit questions on labor issues to *Saipan Tribune* via e-mail at editor@saipantribune.com, or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133 or 135. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the *Saipan Tribune*'s office on the second floor of the CIC Centre on Beach Road, Garapan.

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Security beefed up for Asean summit

By KARL WILSON
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

CEBU—Authorities have ramped up security for this week's summit of Southeast Asian leaders, saying Sunday a terror attack could not be ruled out although there was no specific threat.

After the original gathering last month was postponed at the last minute—ostensibly because of an approaching typhoon—several thousand extra police have been drafted in for security on the resort island of Cebu.

Armed forces are reinforcing police in securing the venue, while a raft of other measures, including an air exclusion zone and navy patrols, are also in the operation schedule.

"As far as we know there is no specific threat against the summit itself, but we have not ruled anything out," General Silverio Alarsio, who is leading the massive security operation for the related summits of the Association of South East Asian Nations and East Asia group, told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

The country's military chief, General Hermogenes Esperon, said that "there are no concrete plans that have been monitored," for possible terror attacks, but the armed forces were bolstering police in securing the event anyway.Days before last mo

Days before last month's summit was due to open, Canada, Britain, Australia and the United States all issued warnings that "credible information suggests terrorists are in the final stages of planning attacks."

None of those governments released specific details, but the Philippines abruptly cancelled the meetings citing an approaching typhoon which eventually missed Cebu.

Australia, Britain and Canada have maintained their travel warnings on Cebu for this week's summit.

One senior diplomat, who did not want to be named, told AFP: "Although the summit itself may not a target, there is always the possibility of something happening on the fringes, especially places frequented by foreign tourists."

Alarsio said that police and military were working closely with security agencies from Australia and the United States on intelligence gathering.

"Although there is no specific threat to the summit you can never rule out the possibility that something may happen, especially outside of Cebu," he cautioned.

He said some 4,000 military personnel from Manila and the central Visayas islands and 6,000 police were now in place in Cebu.

From Wednesday until January 16, he said, a 20-mile (32-kilometer) no-fly zone will be enforced around Mactan airport and the main summit venues of Cebu City, nearby Mandaue City and the luxury Shangri-la resort where the 10 ASEAN leaders will be staying.

AP

SIDEBAR MEETING
South Korean Foreign Minister Song Min-soon, 2nd from right in front, is escorted to the venue of a meeting with Chinese counterpart Li Zhaoxing and Vice Foreign Minister of Japan Katsuhito Asano as a sidebar meeting of ASEAN meeting Friday Jan. 12, 2007 in Mactan, Cebu province in central Philippines.

Asean won't defend Myanmar

By JIM GOMEZ
AP WRITER

CEBU, Philippines (AP)— Southeast Asian countries will not step in to defend Myanmar from U.S. attempts to push the United Nations toward declaring Myanmar's authoritarian rule a threat to regional peace, an official said Thursday.

Myanmar should fulfill a long-standing pledge to democratize and release all political prisoners, including pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, according to Ong Keng Yong, secretary-general of the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Efforts to prod Myanmar to speed up democratic reforms gained new urgency Tuesday, when the U.S. government introduced a U.N. resolution calling the deteriorating political and human rights situation there a serious risk to regional peace.

It urged Myanmar's ruling military junta to immediately free all political prisoners.

The U.S. move has placed countries in ASEAN, of which Myanmar is a member, in an uncomfortable position.

ASEAN foreign ministers, gathered in the Philippine city of Cebu ahead of a regional summit this weekend, discussed the U.S.-endorsed U.N. draft resolution during a working dinner Wednesday and came up with no common position, said Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo.

Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong said that his government considers the situation in Myanmar "an internal issue," and that it was premature to raise it to the level of the Security Council.

His Thai counterpart, Nitya Pibulsongkram, agreed, saying, "We think the resolution should not be coursed through New York in the U.N. Security Council because it is not a question relating to ... international peace and security as such."

However, Ong said Myanmar's continued failure to reform meant ASEAN would not come to its defense. "We don't know what to do," he told reporters. "This is now outside our purview."

Fellow ministers relayed to their Myanmar counterpart Nyan Win their continuing dismay over the junta's failure to rapidly fulfill outlined reforms, and its refusal to release Suu Kyi and other prisoners, Ong said.

ASEAN has repeatedly conveyed such stern reminders to Myanmar in every regional summit. "We continue to call, they may continue to fold their arms, but we have to continue to call," Ong said.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo welcomed some of Myanmar's recent measures, but called "for further progress toward the road to democracy" in a speech at the start of the summit meetings.

A National Convention is drafting guidelines for a new constitution, the first of seven steps outlined in a "roadmap to democracy," which the junta says will culminate in free elections. But no timetable has been announced for completing the process, and the U.N. does not view it as "all-inclusive" because Suu Kyi's party is not taking part.

In Myanmar, Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy or NLD party urged Security Council members to support the U.N. resolution.

"The U.N. Security Council resolution has urged the government to release all political prisoners and to open a substantive political dialogue which would lead to a genuine democratic transition," an NLD statement said.

Gov't cut its expenses by P72B as of November

By MICHELLE REMO
INQUIRER

The government saved P72 billion in the period from January to November last year by spending less than programmed, according to data from the Department of Finance.

The government had an expense budget of P1.013 trillion for the 11 months but it spent only P940.76 billion, the data showed.

The budget deficit as of November amounted to P58.32 billion, 52 percent below the target ceiling of P123 billion for the January-November period. The target limit for the full year was P125 billion.

The government was forced to control spending after Congress failed to pass a proposed national budget of P1.053 trillion. It operated under the budget of 2005, which was about P100 billion less.Congress approved in October a supplemental budget of

Congress approved in October a supplemental budget of P46.9 billion, but finance officials said it came too late for line agencies to spend on programs for 2006.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said the Department of Finance was against using the old budget despite its positive effects on the government's financial condition, because it rendered the government unable to spur growth by spending more on infrastructure and basic services.

On the delayed passage of the proposed national budget for 2007, Teves earlier said the executive branch had urged Congress to finally approve it to avoid scrapping vital infrastructure development projects.

Congress has yet to pass the proposed 2007 national budget of P1.136 trillion.

A rolled-over budget "would improve our fiscal position but it would not be good for the economy in general," Teves said.

Not all the saving was due to under-spending. Data from the Department of Finance showed P30.78 billion was saved because of a drop in interest rates, which cut the government's cost of borrowings.

The interest rate fall was itself attributed to the government's ability to cut in the budget deficit, which lessened the government's needs for debt. With INQUIRER.net

JI militant among 6 slain in sea battle

By JOEL GUINTO
INQUIRER.NET

An Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah militant was among six extremists killed in a gun battle at sea with government forces in the southern province of Tawi-Tawi on Saturday, a military spokesman said.

Gufran alias Abu Samur is a reported trusted aide of JI explosives expert Dulmatin, one of two alleged masterminds of the 2002 Bali bombings who are hiding in the Sulu jungles with the local terrorist group Abu Sayyaf, said Commander Giovanni Carlo Bacordo, Navy spokesman, in a text message Sunday.Aside from Gufran, B

Aside from Gufran, Bacordo said four other fatalities have been identified: Abu Sayyaf sub-commanders Abu Hubaida and Judnam Jamalul, alias Black Killer, Ibrahim Hassan alias Abu Muksin—a confidante of Abu Sayyaf chieftain Khadaffy Janjalani—and Gadar Abubakar, a security escort of Abu Sayyaf spokesman Abu Solaiman.

Jamalul was among 17 Abu Sayyaf members, including Janjalani, who are wanted by the United States for attacks on American citizens. The US had offered a $40,000 bounty for Jamalul's capture or death.

Captured Abu Sayyaf members identified the slain bandits, who are in the military's order of battle, said Brigadier General Juancho Sabban, commander of the 3rd Marine Brigade.Sabban said the group

Sabban said the group was heading to Tawi-Tawi to scout for a new hiding place for Abu Sayyaf and JI leaders who are the targets of a military dragnet in Sulu.

"These are trusted aides and bodyguards of the high-value targets who want to escape from Sulu. They are their advance party," Sabban said in a phone interview.

Sabban said the extremist leaders, including Dulmatin and fellow JI and Bali bombing suspect Umar Patek, have not escaped from Sulu.

"By all indications, they are still in Sulu," he said.

Sabban claimed the Abu Sayyaf had run out of resources and were "trying to escape Sulu to survive."

The bandits were onboard a twin-motor pumpboat (motorized outrigger canoe) off Tawi-Tawi late Saturday evening when they were engaged in a 30-minute gunbattle by Navy and Marine troops.

Troops recovered two M16 rifles an M203 grenade launcher and huge amounts of ammunition on the rebels' boat, marine spokesman Lt. Col. Ariel Caculitan said.

Caculitan said this group was being pursued by members of the Marines in Capual and Pata Island two days ago but managed to escape after a brief clash.

PINOYSTYLE

Second surgery for Ely Buendia

Singer-composer Ely Buendia, who underwent an emergency angioplasty on Sunday at the Asian Hospital in Alabang, needs a second surgery, his manager, Day Cabuhat confirmed last night.

"The first operation addressed only one arterial blockage," Cabuhat told the Inquirer. "There's another one that requires immediate attention."

For the second procedure, Buendia, leader of the 1980s groundbreaking band Eraserheads—and who now heads another group, Pupil—may have to be transferred to another hospital, Cabuhat said.

Doctors blamed stress for the heart attack that the singer suffered Sunday evening while performing in Laguna. Buendia's band was booked solid during the recent holidays.

At press time, a source who has kept vigil at the hospital said the singer's blood pressure was "alarmingly low," but that he was conscious and even talked to a few friends by phone.

Buendia was onstage with his band when he had a heart attack on Sunday night.

This was relayed to Inquirer Entertainment by Day Cabuhat, who co-manages the band with Diane Ventura, Buendia's girlfriend.

Buendia

"His doctors believe his heart was no longer functioning properly then," Cabuhat recalled. "Still, he finished that show in Laguna." The gig ended early, around 7:30 p.m., but Buendia had another appointment. "He was on his way to a meeting when he complained that he was in pain."

Buendia was rushed to the Asian Hospital in Alabang, where he was given an emergency angioplasty.

Cabuhat recounted that Buendia had been very busy during the recent holidays. "He had gigs for two consecutive nights before the attack."

Cabuhat said Ely's family, Ventura and their 6-year-old son Eon, Pupil members Dok Sergio, Bogs Yugo and Yan Yuzon were the only ones allowed to visit. "The hospital has a very strict policy on visitors, but messages and calls from supporters and fellow musicians have been overwhelming."

At press time, Buendia was still in the intensive care unit and there were reports he would be transferred to another hospital for a second angioplasty.

Cabuhat said the doctors were optimistic. "Ely is young (36); they also believe it helped

Readers are thrilled about Lino-KC match

By DOLLY ANNE CARVAJAL
INQUIRER

I was swamped with e-mail and text messages regarding my scoop on Direk Lino Cayetano dating KC Concepcion. People are thrilled about the match! Looks like the lovebirds are making the most of their time together before KC flies back to school in Paris.

They were with some friends in Boracay after Christmas and they came back to Manila in time for New Year's Eve. The cute couple were also spotted in Serendra. Heard that they watched "Enteng Kabisote 3" and "Kasal, Kasali, Kasalo" in Alabang Town Center.

Seems they can't have enough of each other's company. Cheesy as it may sound, what better way to welcome the New Year than by having a new dear?

Daring move

Is Roxanne Guinoo's sexy billboard for a liquor drink an indication that she's ripe for daring roles? Has she become more liberated ever since she split up with Joross Gamboa? She clarifies, "Matagal nang plano 'yung billboard. Nagkataon lang na wala na kami ni Joross when it came out. I'm not ready for bold roles, just more serious roles." And is Mark Herras seriously courting her?

With all the scandals that plague the industry, it's always refreshing to hear about wholesome stars like Jolina Magdangal.

She laughs. "We just met during Sandara's birthday party. Di pala siya suplado. But he's not courting me."

She's a kapamilya. He's a kapuso. Is that a hindrance? Or is all fair in love and (network) war?

Great bonding

I saw Bing Loyzaga and Mylene Dizon shopping at Zara, Shangri-La Mall. Great bonding for separated women like them (and me as well). After all, looking good is the best revenge. If only there were more interesting choices in men as there are in clothes.

No comment

I texted ma cherie amie Dina Bonnevie for her sentiments about Oyo Boy's split up with Angel Locsin. She replied, "Sorry, Oyo warned me not to comment." Much earlier, Dina told me that Oyo is the type who loves too much. Maybe he should just keep on loving so that it will stop hurting. Love is stronger than pain. Love remains. Pain stays only if we let it.

Model Jolens

With all the scandals that plague the industry, it's always refreshing to hear about wholesome stars like Jolina Magdangal. After bagging the well-deserved Catholic Mass Media Serviam Award for being an icon for the youth, Jolens has signed up with Sundance direct sales as the new endorser for its apparel, shoes and bags line. Her initial catalogue, which is expected to set a new fashion trend a la Jolens, will be out in March. Not all image models are good role models. Jolens is an exception to that.

'Agent X44'

Star Cinema opens 2007 literally with a big bang from the high-powered guns of "Agent X44." It's a side-splitting spoof starring Vhong Navarro, dressed in all-white, Tony Ferrer style. Tony himself reprises his legendary slippery character in the film. Vhong and Direk Joyce Bernal guarantee that it will cost more bellyaches than "D' Anothers" did.

After James Bond's hit "Casino Royale," now it's our local secret agent's turn to shine.

For Lino Cayetano's ex, ad imitates life

What a coincidence that direk Lino Cayetano's birthday (Jan. 4) is two days before Sharon Cuneta's (Jan. 6)! After I broke the news about Lino seeing KC, the Mega Mom said on TV: "Si Lino dapat ang magsalita."

Timing is of the essence. Lino has reasons for keeping things hush-hush for now. Maybe when KC is back in Paris, where she studies, Lino's lovesickness will prod him to spill his heart out. He'll miss (her) and tell!

A gay friend made this crazy comment about the budding KC-Lino romance. "Direk's ex Bianca Gonzales and KC both have shampoo commercials. Dapat si Lino din 'cause he's got long hair, too. The line of Bianca in her ad is so bagay to what happened between her and Lino: "Walang Take 2. Can't undo the damage." Ad, este, art imitates life?

Guess who?

The organizer of a corporate show was pissed at this female TV star because she brought along a battalion of back-up dancers. They had agreed on five, but the organizer decided he had no choice but to feed them all.

When he was about to send a runner to a fast-food chain, Ms TV Personality protested, insisting that her dancers be given hotel food, like her. A prod staff member lamented, "Ang dami niyang demands, grabe!"

They had no back-up funds for the back-up dancers. For sure, Ms TV Personality's prima donna ways will backfire sooner or later.

Christmas couples

I asked Marvin Agustin and Pauleen Luna about how they spent their very first Christmas as a couple. Marvs exclaims, "It was the best Christmas I ever had." Pauleen says, "Simple but meaningful. Basta nung eve nasa akin si Marvs."

By keeping details to themselves, the sacredness of the memory is preserved. What about Marvin's twins? Pauleen hasn't met them but she is dying to. "I wanted to send nga his kids gifts but dyahe pa ko."

Pauleen has nothing to worry about. She must bear in mind that Marvin's kids occupy a separate ventricle in his heart and so does she.

Another Pinay plays Fantine

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
INQUIRER

Apart from Lea Salonga on Broadway, another Filipino singer-actress is playing the coveted role of Fantine in "Les Misérables"—this time, in the West End production in London.

Salonga herself earlier informed Inquirer Entertainment of the two other Filipino Fantines—Joan Almedilla on the US national tour and Joanna Ampil in the UK.

Ampil first played the part from July 2003 to June 2004.

Although she was a veteran of other Cameron Mackintosh productions, she still had to audition for Fantine at the Drury Lane, where she had portrayed Kim in two stagings of "Miss Saigon," in 1993 and 1998.

In 1996, she was "handpicked" by Andrew Lloyd Webber to play Mary Magdalene in his production of "Jesus Christ Superstar." Ampil as Magdalene was a first for Filipino artists.

All set

During the recent holidays, she juggled the roles of Heidi in "I Sing!" in the UK and Mimi in "Rent" in Germany.

Now, she is all set to reprise the role of Fantine in "Les Miz" at the Queen's Theater from Jan. 29 to June 23, according to her official website.

In a 2003 interview, Ampil thanked "Les Miz" producer Mackintosh for "the opportunity to be the first Asian, nontraditional Fantine."

She described Fantine as "a woman full of hope and positive [feelings]."

During rehearsals, the director kept reminding Ampil of the words "calm and dignified"—the essence of Fantine. "She has so much love to offer. I just love getting to know her story," she related.

Critics showered Ampil with praise in her "Les Miz" comeback three years ago (she played Eponine in 2000).

What's On raved that she was "awesome;" The Evening Standard called her "enchanting."

Aside from "Les Miz," "I Sing" and "Rent," Ampil also worked on a special edition CD single entitled "Reach for the Stars."

According to her website, all proceeds from the CD will benefit the Sun and Moon Home for Children in Manila, which was set up by "Les Miz" and "Saigon" composer Claude-Michel Schönberg and his Filipino friends.

Ampil

INQUIRER/ROMY HOMILLADA

Kwon Sang Woo during his recent visit to Manila.

Face to face with Kwon Sang Woo

By PAM PASTOR
INQUIRER

When Kwon Sang Woo packed for his recent visit to Manila, he made sure he included a pair of swimming trunks. "I know the beaches are beautiful here. It's a relaxed place, good for resting."

Sadly, the Korean star had little time for resting and swimming. Kwon spent his few days in Manila promoting The Face Shop, getting to know his fans at insanely packed mall meet-and-greet sessions and painting houses for Gawad Kalinga.

Huge billboards announced his planned visit, and Koreanovela fans held their breath in anticipation. When Kwon, Korean actor and endorser of The Face Shop, finally arrived in Manila, he did not disappoint. He was as charming and as lovable as the character he plays on television.

Known to Pinoy fans as Cholo, a popular character on the Koreanovela "Stairway to Heaven," Kwon is famous not only in his own country but throughout Asia. His visit to the Philippines was just one of the stops of his Asia-wide tour last December.

Kwon said he had a lot in common with Cholo. "We are the same when it comes to his passion when he's in love and how he jokes a lot around with his friends. I really identify with the characters I play."

Kwon is also the face of The Face Shop, South Korea's No. 1 cosmetics and skincare brand. According to Jung Woon Ho, chair of The Face Shop, Kwon was chosen because "he was the hottest actor in Korea—he still is. His image is clean and his reputation is very healthy."

Clean, fresh and positive

Kwon said his role as The Face Shop's spokesperson gave his fans the chance to see another side of him—different from the manly and sexy roles he occasionally played. "The products work for me. And it's a way for people to see my clean, fresh and positive side."

The brand, which has 400 stores in South Korea and 88 around the world including in the United States, Canada, Australia and Taiwan, found a new home in the Philippines last year thanks to Ben Chan's Suyen Corp.

"As a brand that is an ambassador for naturalism, we are working hard to spread the gospel in the Philippines and in the world as well," said Jung Woon Ho.

The Face Shop offers over a thousand products made using 600 ingredients. Best-selling products in the Philippines include the Quick and Clean and the White Tree lines, and the various mask sheets, which are a favorite of Kwon, too.

At first it seems unusual for a skincare brand to use a man as an image model, but after discovering Kwon's passion for cleansing and dedication to taking care of himself, everything made complete sense.

Beauty regimen

He has genetics (he says his mom has great skin, too) and his beauty regimen to thank for his flawless skin.

"Cleansing is very important. I'm very picky with my cleansing products. I use facial foam and warm water then I rinse three to four times with cold water. I also use lotion and skin essence. Aside from using the products, I make sure I get enough sleep and I go for treatments when there's time."

Kwon doesn't just make sure his skin is in top condition, he takes care of his body, too.

"I work out two to three times a week. I drink a lot of water. I don't really deprive myself. I eat what I want, but in moderation. I don't eat heavy meals at night and I eat a lot of fruits."

He doesn't consider it vanity, just part of the job. "I don't think I'm vain. But I'm really supposed to take care of myself because of work."

He believes all men should do the same. "Guys who don't take care of themselves wouldn't end up with pretty girls," he said. He thinks men who refuse to try skincare products are being silly. "All it takes is 10 minutes. It's so easy to do."

He gave one tip for girls who want their boyfriends to start taking care of their skin more. "Just drag them to the nearest Face Shop outlet."

Gawad Kalinga visit

During his visit to the country, Kwon also went to a Gawad Kalinga village being built in Tondo. The Face Shop made a donation and he helped paint houses.

"The kids had a special presentation. I was very touched. Despite the surroundings, they were bright, happy and hopeful. Thanks to this project, the kids will have a stable environment. I wanted to tell them that despite their surroundings, they should keep their dreams alive. They will survive."

He also had a chance to spend time with some Koreans who have chosen to make the Philippines their second home.

"I met a Korean woman who told me she loves the Philippines and that it's a good place to live in. I'm happy to be able to come and say hello to Koreans who are away from home."

Kwon has since said goodbye to Manila, but he said he intended to come back.

"As long as I have fans in the Philippines, I would love to go back. I'd go back with my family for personal pleasure."

And hopefully he'll have time for a good swim then.

The Face Shop is located at Glorietta 3, Bonifacio High Street, The Block-SM North Edsa, Robinsons Galleria and SM Mall of Asia. Shops will also open soon in Eastwood Citiwalk, Shoppesville Greenhills, SM Pampanga, Robinsons Ermita and Shangri-La Plaza.

Kwon Sang Woo on The Face Shop:

"It offers quality products for affordable prices." Check out his favorites—they might become yours, too.

For men only. Kwon relies on The Face Shop's Pure line to keep his skin hydrated. The line, which purifies the skin, controls excess sebum and tightens pores, includes a toner, emulsion, shaving foam, oil and fragrance made for men with rough and sensitive skin.

Basic skincare. Quick and Clean is a must-try skincare line, both for men and women. It is a quick solution to breakouts and blemishes, and includes a foam wash, sebum control toner, whitening mist, sun cream, hydro fluid and first-aid gel.

Skin masks. The Face Shop is popular for its seemingly endless array of masks —some you can wash off, some you can peel off. Not only does Kwon Sang Woo find them a lot of fun, he also uses them to prep his skin for big events.

Jesi wears a bra for the first time

By NINI VALERA
INQUIRER

"Starstruck" hopeful Jesi Corcuera wore a bra for the first time in her life on Sunday for a production number on GMA 7's reality talent search.

Corcuera, a self-confessed lesbian, said she was told by the show's production staff to wear the undergarment. "My aunt had to buy me one after I received the [instruction]," she said.

Corcuera performed a dance number with fellow contestants Lizzy Pecson, Kris Bernal and Rich Asuncion. They all wore skimpy white tank tops and pants. The top showed Corcuera's cleavage, which made her look uncomfortable.

Backstage, she was heard complaining about the bra. But Starstruck council member Loma Tolentino praised her for "doing the right thing."

Corcuera survived the challenges last week, and remained among the Top 14 contenders to the titles of Starstruck Ultimate Pair, Sweetheart and Hunk. A joke has started to circulate about Corcuera possibly becoming the first Ultimate Sweet Hunk.

Two booted

Undoubtedly one of the prettiest among the girls in this year's batch, Corcuera is also one of the most popular with the public. In the audience on Sunday, she had the most number of fans—carrying posters bearing her picture, chanting her name and applauding the loudest every time she came on stage. She roused them to clap and shout louder at the end of her production number.

Booted were Lizzy Pecson and Chad Burden. Pecson's elimination was a letdown to some people, who earlier predicted that she would make it to the finish.

No one was disappointed over Burden's fall. "He would not have made it to the finals," said a member of the production staff.

Starstruck Council member Douglas Quijano delivered a parting shot for the two losers: "It's not the end of the world. The dream does not end here. You can try again."

None of the contestants gave the production staff a hard time during workshops last week, said council member Louie Ignacio. During the Dec. 31 elimination round, Ignacio gave Corcuera, Jewel Mishe and Dave Valentino a score of 0.

Ignacio took Mische to task on Sunday for her lackluster performance in a song number with Stef Prescott, Hazel Uy and Renee Lascana.

A music major at the UP Conservatory of Music, Mische clearly did not have a singing voice and botched her part in an ensemble number. She earlier told Inquirer Entertainment that her major was Piano.

Ignacio told Mische that he would send her a videotape of her performance so she could review it and decide if she had enough talent to become a star. Ironically, Mishe was an early audience favorite.

Fifty percent of the contestants' scores come from the Starstruck Council. Text votes from the audience comprise the rest.

The public can also cast their votes through the Internet, giving overseas viewers a chance to participate. Log on to www.starstruck.tv.

EDWIN BACASMAS

"Starstruck" contender Jesi Corcuera.

OPINYON

Warming signs, warning signs

There's The Rub
By CONRADO DE QUIROS
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

You think that last year produced storms that could never possibly come this way again? Think again. This year could bring worse.

Stronger storms in Asia, floods in Latin America and harsher droughts in Australia and Africa: that is the prediction of scientists as a resurgent El Niño and La Niña combined stalk the length and breadth of the planet this year. 2007 could possibly be the hottest year ever in recorded history.

Raphael Satter of The Associated Press writes: "The warmest year on record is 1998, when the average global temperature was 1.2 degrees Fahrenheit higher than the long-term average of 57 degrees. Though such a change appears small, incremental differences can, for example, add to the ferocity of storms by evaporating more steam off the ocean.

"There is a 60 percent chance that the average global temperature for 2007 will match or break the record…. The consequences of the high temperatures could be felt worldwide. El Niño, which is now under way in the Pacific Ocean and is expected to last until May, occurs irregularly. But when it does … Pacific storms can be more intense."

Even as we preoccupy ourselves with the burning events in this country, events that affect us immediately and powerfully, let us spare a thought for the cataclysmic, even if seemingly slow-acting, events in this planet, events that could mean the end of all life as we know it. I don't know that it's completely whimsical to think about it as the point where Science and the Bible meet; but unless humankind rouses itself up to the peril, we could be facing an Apocalypse in the not very distant future—if not in our lifetime, at least in that of our children. The Bible identifies damnation as hellfire, Science identifies damnation as global warming. It's a tossup which one is hotter.

You can't have a more life-and-death issue than that. Which is how I've become an ardent espouser of the environmental cause lately.

A couple of years ago, I used to tell the environmental groups that came to ask me how to press their cause better before the public to find a way to make it a matter of life and death. My problem with the "green" advocacy, I said—at least as it has been pitched in this country—was that it radiated a strong aspect of tree-hugging. It seemed more like a luxury that bejeweled matrons who had little better to do indulged in, encouraged no end by their executive husbands for many reasons, the least being to find tax shelters and the most being to find time for their secretaries.

Saving the trees and clean air, among others, were what we associated the green cause with. Both, of course, had a glimmer of urgency in them, but only a glimmer. The environmental groups could always argue that the disappearance of the country's forests posed the direst threats to this country, some of which had already turned into a frightening reality, and that tolerating the levels of smog in Metro Manila in particular was committing slow-motion suicide. But given that they paled in comparison with direr threats to life, like hunger—I remember from my youth that we activists justified our chain-smoking by saying that, before cigarettes, a lot of things were bound to kill us first—they always stood to be drowned by other seemingly more pressing issues.

A footnote to this is that a lot of things did fell friends before cigarettes could work their poison in their system. But many of them did also die from cancer, which probably came from a combination of cigarettes and a stressful life.

December 2004 changed all that. A couple of things during that month drove home the point about the green cause being a matter of life and death, which truly should shove Greenpeace and the other environmental groups into the limelight in this country today. Those two events were the fierce storm that brought the treeless hills of Infanta town in Quezon province tumbling to the ground, burying hundreds of folk below in a muddy grave; and the tsunami that wiped out an entire village in Aceh and ravaged neighboring islands.

Suddenly, green turned to red, as in blood. I would learn later that that year broke whole new records in ecological disasters, including the inconceivable, which was a hurricane hitting the South Atlantic. The writing on the wall has gotten bigger and more frighteningly gothic fonts since then. Not least for us, with the visitations of the new, improved, supertyphoons that have bleached parts of this country more efficiently than Mr. Clean. Yes, Virginia, there's a better explanation for the utter devastation of the Bicol region than the not-entirely-unbelievable theory that the storms knocked everything about in the course of its frenzied search for Edcel Lagman and Luis Villafuerte, as per instructions of Divine Retribution. That is, that storms increase in water density and wind velocity from meeting heat, which is what the planet's increasingly steaming oceans today emit.

Completely literally, the oceans—not the least of them the Pacific, which is where the Philippines lies—are whipping up a storm. Suddenly, being the gateway to Asia, which has made this country ideal for US bases, is no longer something to be happy about. It also means being Asia's welcoming committee for Pacific storms.

I won't go into what can be done about this. This is a country that won't move anyway until it's scared to death, and sometimes not even then. But there is that prediction for this year—the closest in known history that we will experience hell on earth. There's only one thing that's scarier than a scary movie. That is a scary truth.

Look at the face of Bicol today and see if words like "climate" and "environment" do not spell the difference between life and death. Between a box of chocolates and a coffin.

The Thirteen Martyrs

Looking Back
By AMBETH OCAMPO
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Yesterday a brass band played rousing music in Plaza Moriones, Tondo, Manila, competing with the ambient sound of jeeps, trucks and people going to work early in the morning. It was the 110th anniversary of the execution of Domingo Franco (1856-1897) whose bronze bust was the focal point of commemoration and the plaza.

Manila Mayor Lito Atienza, who was not in the trademark Hawaiian shirt, arrived before the floral offering and made a walk-through inspection of the "barangay" [neighborhood district], surprising street sweepers who did not do a good job that morning. Celia Diaz Laurel, granddaughter of Domingo Franco, led a small group of the hero's descendants, including Julio Diaz, who disappointed fans who expected the movie star and not the distinguished gentleman in the second row.

Domingo Franco was executed in Bagumbayan in the early morning of Jan. 11, 1897 on or around the same place where Jose Rizal fell dead 12 days earlier. Franco is a member of the group remembered in history as the "Thirteen Martyrs of Bagumbayan." Unfortunately, we know the title of the tragic event but do not remember the individual names of all these heroes and why they were executed. Nobody needs to know them unless you are a student taking an exam in Makabayan or Hekasi. The names of these Thirteen Martyrs are plain useless information unless, of course, you come across them as a nervous contestant in "Game ka na ba?" where this trivia may open the opportunity for a million-peso windfall.

For whatever it is worth and to remind us of the other 12 heroes who were not mentioned in Plaza Moriones yesterday, here is the list of the Thirteen Martyrs:

1. Domingo Franco was a tobacco merchant who was originally from Capiz but moved to Manila. One of the founding members of Liga Filipina, he knew Jose Rizal and was said to have distributed the "Noli me tangere" and "El Filibusterismo" when it was dangerous to read or own a copy. He helped raise money to send to the so-called Propaganda Movement in Spain and for these, he was arrested, tortured and eventually executed.2. Numerio

2. Numerio Adriano (1846-1897) was a lawyer and a Mason. He knew Rizal and Apolinario Mabini. Being a founding member of Liga Filipina, he was also implicated in the Katipunan.

3. Moises Salvador (1868-1897) studied at the Ateneo Municipal and took further studies in Madrid. He knew Rizal and he was a Mason and a member of Liga Filipina—just the right mix to be included in the group executed in early 1897.

4. Francisco L. Roxas (1851-1897) was a musician and businessman. He would probably be better known today had his musical compositions survived, but then his life was cut short when he was implicated in the Katipunan revolt. He protested this and maintained his innocence, but since his name was on a list that was found by the authorities, he became a reluctant hero and joined the Thirteen Martyrs of Bagumbayan.

5. Jose Dizon was an engraver in Casa de Moneda in Manila. He was involved in the Katipunan, having joined a group that met sympathetic Japanese for the procurement of arms for the revolution. Like all the other members of the Thirteen Martyrs, he too was a Mason.

6. Benedicto Nijaga, a second lieutenant in the Spanish army, was reputedly a good soldier. But his loyalty became suspect when he was connected to the Katipunan revolt. We do not know whether his name was on a list of Katipuneros found during the raid of the printing shop of Diario de Manila, or whether he was implicated by an enemy or somebody who had been tortured.

7. Cristobal Medina was a Filipino corporal in the Spanish army, yet his loyalty remained with his country and his countrymen so he joined the Katipunan and was supposed to have helped plan the uprising in San Juan del Monte on Aug. 30, 1896. For this act, real or imagined, he was implicated.

8. Antonio Salazar was a businessman originally from Cavite and owned Bazaar El Cisne. It was from his confession, extracted by torture, that others were implicated in the Katipunan, particularly Domingo Franco.

9. Ramon A. Padilla, an employee of the Manila customs house, was rude to Emilio Aguinaldo who nursed a grudge against him that almost led to a duel. He later apologized to Aguinaldo, and this probably saved his life for the moment, but only until Jan. 11, 1897.

10. Faustino Villaruel (1841-1897) was a merchant from Pandacan and a Mason like all the others. He was also a founding member of Liga Filipina, and supporter of the Propaganda Movement.

11. Braulio Rivera (1867-1897) was a member of the Katipunan.

12. Luis Enciso Villareal (1846-1897) was originally from Daraga, Albay, and was known for his graceful dancing and his fiddle playing. He read a French manual on tailoring and opened a shop on Escolta Street, where he conducted brisk business. He won the lottery and traveled in Japan. He was probably implicated with the Katipunan because he was a Mason and a member of Liga Filipina, and contributed to the Propaganda Movement.

13. Eustacio Manalac is the person we know so little about. Nobody has even done basic research to even find out his date of birth and simple biographical data like marital status, children, occupation, etc. All we are told is that he was a Mason and was rounded up as a suspected Katipunero when the Katipunan was exposed in August 1896.

Commentsarewelcomeataocampo@ateneo.edu.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

People, culture factors in genuine change

In the Dec. 17 prayer rally at the Quirino Grandstand, Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, called for "educative and moral character change in all of us," instead of Charter change. He said there should be "reform of morals, renewal of values in all of us" so that our country would be on the road to change. I agree with him completely.

Japan, which spearheaded the so-called "flying geese" formation of economic achievers in Asia after World War II, relied on the values, attitude and behavior pattern of its people to attain its hallowed place as the second most powerful economic power in the world today. These virtues were inculcated in the mind of the Japanese people at a certain point in their education. They were also taught humility, modesty and group consciousness so that there would be harmony in life.

In contrast, we Filipinos have to start from what a foreigner called "damaged culture." As a people, we are afflicted by extreme personalism, quarrelsome behavior and attitudinal problem. True, the majority in the House of Representatives who tried to revise the Constitution through a constituent assembly has "group consciousness," but it is of the selfish and avaricious kind. The members of the majority are not truly after the common good of all Filipinos.

House Speaker Jose de Venecia keeps harping that Japan and the other Asian achievers gained economic success because of their parliamentary system of government while deliberately ignoring the importance of the people and culture factors that made their success possible. He also claims that the parliamentary system would eliminate political bickering. We should be wary; he is pulling the wool over our eyes. If political dominance were conferred on the winning party under a parliamentary system, the Philippines would be in deeper trouble because most Filipino politicians are wanting in leadership, good governance and scruples. Who can prevent the reincarnation of political stalwarts proclaiming "What are we in power for?"

A Korean who has lived and worked in the Philippines has expressed his admiration for the kindness, good nature and friendliness of the Filipinos and the beauty of the country. His only regret is that "the Filipinos do not love their country." He is acutely right because if we do love our country, we should then be like Korea or Japan now. My heart bleeds when I compare my country with the two economic powerhouses.

Maria Luisa Insiong
12 President Avenue, Parañaque City

SAMU'T SARI

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

CONTEST WINNER
Roy de Guzman, of the World Resort Hotel's front office, in a performance that won him the singing contest during the hotel employees' Christmas Party.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

PAGEANT WINNER
Miss Osang Tan reacts after she was adjudged Miss Universe during the Saipan World Resort employees' Christmas Party. Tan represented SPANESS as Miss Korea at the party's beauty pageant.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

TAU GAMMA PHI PARTY
Tau Gamma Phi: Brothers Jimmy, Rodel, Rio, Erick, Roneric, Larry, Edwin, Lupin and Edgar pose for a souvenir photo during the Tau Gamma Phi fraternity's Christmas party held on Dec. 30, 2006

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tau Gamma Phi: Brothers Larry, Edwin, Lupin, Edgar, Rio, Erick, Roneric and Jimmy during the Tau Gamma Phi fraternity's Christmas party held on Dec. 30, 2006. Not in the picture are brothers Alex, Dexter, Jaime, Adrian, Joel, Bert, Joey, Thandy, Rocky, Reylan, Gerry, and Jay.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tropang Maharot's Cecil, Bernard, Gerry, Cheska, Jackie, Kyla, Jamphy, Jane, Julius, Edgar, Cherry and Jerome join the Tau Gamma Phi fraternity in a Christmas party held on Dec. 30, 2006.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tropang MYOB: Jude of Power 99, Che, Bong, Mark, Romeo, Jesse and Ronetikz.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tropang MYOB: Jesse, Romeo, Bong, Che, Ronetikz, Mark and Jude. Not in the picture are Lanie, Marie, Jojo, ,Junso, Maya, Romy, Rocky, Sherley, Louie, Mitch, Josephine, Bradley, Edward and Tatay Danny.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tropang Maharot: Edgar, Albert, Jane, Jackie, Oslec, Nene, Julius and Jerome join the Tau Gamma Phi's Christmas party held on Dec. 30, 2006. Not in the picture are Nanette, Jona, Dhan, Elmer, April, Anne, Cris, Jhen, Jonathan, Maja, Rico, Gang, Oca, Roland, Eric, George, Ador, Teffany, Eden, Samantha and Chito.

Maharlika
PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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